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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER: FINNISH FM KANERVA,S VISIT TO
WASHINGTON

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREGORY THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

Scenesetter: Finnish FM Kanerva's Visit to Washington

11. (C) SUMMARY: FM Kanerva's June 11 visit gives us an excellent opportunity to capitalize on the new GOF's stated goal of improving relations with Washington. Finland has a center-right government for the first time since 1995, and the right message from the Secretary will lay out our expectations and help Kanerva and his coalition turn words into deeds on several US priorities. Finland has already been a strong partner in many areas; however, the new GOF shows a willingness to do more to support ISAF operations in Afghanistan; to promote democracy in Russia and Europe's near neighborhood; and to enhance Finland's relationship with NATO. Kanerva will not promise anything he cannot deliver but, for the first time in seven years, Finland offers a FM who is keenly interested in US views and will actively seek out areas in which the US and Finland can cooperate more effectively. END SUMMARY.

TURNING THE RIGHT INSTINCTS INTO ACTION

12. (C) Since coming to office in mid-April, Finland's new government has said literally all the right things concerning US-Finnish relations. During the Ambassador's first round of courtesy calls and our early meetings at other levels, it has become abundantly clear that the new center-right coalition (Finland's first since 1995) has all the right instincts. The Cabinet and Parliament's leadership have stated in the clearest possible terms that they want to build a warm relationship with Washington. FM Ilkka Kanerva's visit is timely for two key reasons: First, the visit gives us an important early opportunity to spell out exactly which issues are of the highest priority to us, and to discuss what we expect from a pro-active friend and partner. Second, the FM is genuinely determined to undo damage done to the bilateral relationship by his predecessor. Because Kanerva is eager to put the tone and substance of the bilateral relationship back on track, he will be very receptive to any suggestions Secretary Rice makes for turning the GOF's stated desire for improved US-Finnish relations into action.

TARGETED AREAS OF COOPERATION: CONCRETE RESULTS

13. (SBU) With this in mind, the Embassy sees the greatest opportunities for concrete results with the new GOF in three areas: (1) increased support for NATO/ISAF efforts in Afghanistan in the short-term; (2) increased, tangible Finnish contributions to NATO and other security operations -- and greater domestic dialogue on NATO membership -- in the short- and medium-term; and (3) concrete programs and focused diplomacy to help promote freedom and democracy in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Balkans.

DOING MORE IN AFGHANISTAN

14. (SBU) Finland's solid contributions to NATO/ISAF peacekeeping operations (PKO) and to Afghanistan's reconstruction can be expected to continue; our challenge now is finding ways to help the new government do more. The GOF currently has 106 peacekeepers on the ground at PRTs in Meymaneh and Mazar-al-Sharif, along with a small but highly effective civilian team that supports PKO with appropriate, targeted development assistance. Afghanistan is at the top of Finland's list for reconstruction aid, with \$12 million in annual funding secured for at least the next six years. Finland recently transmitted to NATO an extensive list of non-lethal equipment it intends to donate to support both the ANP and the Afghan National Army (ANA). Looking forward, targets of opportunity to further enhance Finland's role in Afghanistan include:

-- MORE TROOPS: The 220-troop engineering battalion will conclude its mission in Southern Lebanon this calendar year. The Finns will likely reassign some resources to other missions in Lebanon and may seek to augment their presence in Kosovo. However, we should also encourage them to bolster their current numbers in Afghanistan.

-- PRT LEADERSHIP: Despite the recent death of a Finnish soldier at Meymenah, political will and public opinion strongly favor the Finnish mission in Afghanistan. The MOD is planning for eventual Finnish leadership of a PRT, and the Secretary may be able to secure an early commitment from Kanerva that Finland will do so when either Hungary or Sweden relinquish leadership of their PRTs at some point over the next 1-2 years.

-- EXPANDING FINLAND'S CIVILIAN CM MODEL: Finland has very successfully "embedded" a civilian crisis management (CM) team within the Norwegian-led PRT at Meymenah. The team identifies development and reconstruction projects that directly support the PRT, and its work has been hailed by ISAF as a model for small countries. We should encourage Finland to "export" this model to other PRTs, particularly if it takes leadership of one.

-- COUNTERNARCOTICS AND RULE OF LAW: Thanks in part to the excellent experience Finland had with the Iraqi police training mission in Jordan (to which Finland provided 11 trainers), it now intends to provide ten trainers to the new program for the Afghan National Police (ANP), along with three experts for the NATO-Russia Council counternarcotics operation. Finland also contributed \$1 million to the Law and Order Trust Fund. Kanerva will likely be receptive to the Secretary's suggestions regarding how the GOF could do even more in the counternarcotics fight.

-- LETHAL WEAPONS DONATION: We understand the new government is "re-examining" the previous GOF's decision to reject our request for a donation of AK-47s to support the ANP and ANA. However, this issue remains politically difficult domestically. The Finnish opposition (i.e., the now-out-of-power Social Democrats who scuttled the donation in the first place) will pounce on it if the GOF is too aggressive, and President Halonen does not favor it. If an opportunity to press our case arises, Kanerva

will be forthcoming and welcome our advice. However, our other goals in Afghanistan are more "do-able" in the short term, and the GOF may seek to move forward with other Afghanistan projects before challenging the opposition and the President on this one.

NATO COOPERATION

15. (C) While many in Kanerva's Conservative Party actually favor Finland's joining NATO, their Center Party coalition partners and President Halonen both oppose membership. Nevertheless, the new GOF's platform clearly calls for enhancing Finland's cooperation with the Alliance. Substantial roles in NATO's Afghanistan and Kosovo operations will continue, and the Finns are now sending very positive signals regarding the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the Strategic Air Consortium (SAC). For the Kanerva meeting, targets of opportunity on NATO include:

-- A CLEARER TIMELINE ON NRF: Finland has EU Battlegroup commitments through mid-2008, but MOD and MFA sources both see the benefit of complementing Battlegroup commitments with NRF commitments. The new government would like to attend the Global Force Generation conference this fall, and we have urged them to see that as a good target for making a commitment to the NRF. A strong statement from the Secretary in support of Finnish NRF ambitions will help move this process along.

-- ENCOURAGE SAC BUY-IN: The MOD is eager to join the airlift consortium and sees the advantages for Finland of doing so. Finland also hopes to produce a letter of intent before the June 11 SAC conference. A clear statement from the Secretary on the importance we attach to the SAC will help Kanerva firm up the political-level across the GOF.

-- NATO MEMBERSHIP: Long a taboo topic for any politician in Finland, this issue now appears open for discussion. MOD Hakamies became the first MOD in Finnish history to openly proclaim that he favors membership, and while Kanerva has not said so publicly we know he agrees. Public opinion polls in Finland do not show majorities in favor of NATO membership, but the Conservatives understand that this will only change if the government shows leadership. As noted, they also face obstacles in President Halonen and their own Center Party partners, but a show of support from the Secretary will bolster leadership instincts on the NATO membership question.

FREEDOM AGENDA

16. (C) The interests of the USG and the GOF are in close harmony when it comes to support for democracy, civil society and human rights in Russia and Europe's new neighborhood. The government inherits several ongoing projects that complement US Freedom Agenda goals, including programs to support NGOs and educational exchanges in Russia and Belarus. Through bilateral visits and other diplomacy, the GOF has also begun reaching out more to opposition leaders in Belarus; moderates in Serbia; and pro-democracy forces in Ukraine and the Caucasus. Recent events in Russia and Estonia have also emboldened the government to move away from the traditional Finnish propensity to acquiesce to Russia on tough issues; indeed, Kanerva and others have publicly challenged Moscow's policies and actions in ways the previous government eschewed. Finns are not yet fully comfortable with challenging Russia or taking a high profile role in pro-democracy programs that host governments might view as "violations of their sovereignty;" however, there are targets of opportunity on the Freedom Agenda and promoting democracy in Europe's New Neighborhood that might include:

-- COMMON EU POLICIES TOWAR RUSSIA: Kanerva showed real leadership in calling for a "common EU policy" to support Estonia and in criticizing Moscow's heavy-handed reprisals during the Bronze Statue crisis. This was a clear break from the practice of previous administrations, which preferred to sit back and let Brussels take the lead on contentious Russia-related issues. Bilateral trade difficulties -- including Moscow's unilateral ban on Finnish poultry imports, a questionable tariff on wood exports, Russian impediments to cross-border truck transit -- may further encourage Finland to step out of its shell and begin pressing for a tougher EU line in some areas. The GOF is also facing rapidly building domestic pressure from the Parliament, the press and civil society to become more outspoken in urging Russia to improve its human rights record. In sum, the GOF is realizing that the time-honored "gentle" approach to Russia no longer produces results that are in Finland's interest, and that the time has likely come to join Germany, the Baltics and other EU members who are pressing for a more united front in the face of Russian misbehavior. Words of encouragement from the Secretary and a clear emphasis on the importance she attaches to improved US-EU coordination in dealing with Russia will be helpful in pushing the GOF toward showing more leadership in this area.

-- SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS: Finland continues to fund several NGOs in Russia that are engaged in environmental and educational activities near the Finnish border. There is also significant cross-border educational exchange. When the Duma passed its infamous NGO legislation last year, Finland protested through diplomatic channels and insisted on exemptions to ensure that the NGOs it funds could continue their work. There is significant cross-border educational exchange, and Finland also supports the International Humanities University in Vilnius for Belarusian exiles through the EU and bilaterally. The new GOF understands the need to do more, but is still seeking direction in identifying the particular niches it can best fill. Kanerva will be open to suggestions from the Secretary or others.

-- SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION AND PRO-DEMOCRACY LEADERS: Senior GOF officials have begun to take a more direct role in reaching out to pro-democracy leaders, especially in the Balkans and in Belarus. PM Vanhanen hosted Belarusian opposition leader Alexandre Milinkevic last fall; the Finns highlighted support for democratic forces during the EU-Ukraine Summit that occurred during their EU Presidency; and President Halonen will host Serb President Tadic June 2 in an attempt to help bolster pro-Western forces within Belgrade's new government. Finland also targets significant development and civil society funding to Kosovo. The Finns should be encouraged to play an even more active role in showing public support for pro-democracy leaders and in visiting countries where they can reach out to democratic forces, with Belarus, Ukraine and the Balkans being perhaps the best fits for Finland. The Secretary may also wish to encourage similar Finnish thinking on Russia.

COMMENT

17. (C) Kanerva and the new GOF genuinely want to improve both the tone and the substance of the bilateral relationship. Unlike the previous FM, Kanerva will also listen to our views, seek our advice, and seriously endeavor to identify where Finland can do more to bolster cooperation in areas of shared interests. We have also emphasized that the US is looking for concrete results, not simply discussions of ongoing processes. Kanerva understands this, and intends to come to Washington with something to offer. However, true to the Finnish character, he also will never promise anything he cannot deliver. A clear message from the Secretary that emphasizes her priorities and her ideas for how Finland

can do more will help Kanerva -- both as he seeks to expand Finland's role in NATO, Afghaistan and Europe's New Neighborhood, and as he looks to build domestic support for the new GOF's effort to improve trans-Atlantic relations.

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